United Nations E/CN.6/2005/NGO/31

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 February 2005

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-ninth session
28 February-11 March 2005
Item 3 (c) (ii) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls

Statement submitted by Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2005/1.

05-22706 (E) 020305

Building Sustainable Peace: Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Inequity

The December tsunamis have taken the scales from our eyes. It is clear beyond the shadow of a doubt, from the multiple crises they hurled at the world, that meeting critical human needs now and attending to the ravages to Earth are imperatives for all of us. Not just the needs of the homeless and devastated in South Asia, but the millions who die from the "tsunamis" of HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria that assail Africa and, indeed, all continents, each and every week; not just the devastation of coastlines in Asia, but the stripping of tropical and temperate forests, the pollution of land, air, and water, the wasting of the future by the hardships of poverty imposed by structural adjustment programs and market hyper-capitalism, and war: these are the woes that women must cry out with one voice to have addressed.

Five years into the 21st century, our concerns are graver than ever, as is the threat to global security in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, with an endless "war on terror," escalation of militarism, nuclear proliferation, abandonment of major UN international treaties, corporatism, religious fundamentalism, and the extreme warning signs of global ecosystem collapse.

All of these disturbances reveal the scope of insecurities and complex emergencies facing humankind. But the tsunamis of 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean placed insecurity and chaotic patterns squarely in the global psyche. They must be addressed.

The violence, insecurity, and loss of human rights accompanying war, economic failure, ecological collapse, and failed states intensify the many concerns underlying the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Mid-term reviews and the present review process indicate that many of the recommendations addressing the dire concerns of women (especially the violence and threats women face in conflict) have not been adequately addressed and therefore must remain high on the global agenda.

The unacceptably slow pace of improvements and the partial breakdown of UN processes make it imperative to have overarching strategies to address the flawed paradigms and policies that prevail despite their failures. In order to advance social justice, democracy, and human rights, especially those of women, and to end the scourge of war, committed energetic leadership is required. A working paper for NGOs, Beijing + 10 Review: A Feminist Strategy for 2004-05 (prepared through a consultation process by the Center for Global Women's Leadership) states: "In order to move forward, feminists need to take back the initiative, re-insert patriarchy into the equation, and address the overarching challenges posed by neoliberal globalization, militarism, and fundamentalisms that threaten the gains made for women's rights." Certainly, women must take their place on the global stage to shape global governance and international agendas. For too many years empty promises and hollow exhortations have filled the diplomatic and political airways while the pathways to a better world remain a difficult road to traverse.

In the wake of the misery and destruction from the tsunamis, millions of people around the world are responding with compassion and generosity. This crisis is an opportunity for the world's leaders and civil society to discern the root causes of global insecurity and the need for a new approach.

Breaking the cycle of violence and inequity

It is time to reframe the way we see the world, to adopt systemic thinking, to empathize, to imagine what it is like to be in someone else's shoes, if they have them.

It is time to bring the new realities of an interrelated world into our view, and to make personal and professional decisions that will transmute failures into sustainable gains.

It is time for decisions making economic justice transcend injustice and equity. Iron-fisted global economics has been particularly unhelpful to women.

It is time for policies making ecological integrity supplant environmental devastation.

It is time for conversion of the pervasive culture of war into a culture of peace.

It is time to see global security as common security.

The emerging security concept of the "responsibility to protect", coupled with humanitarian intervention, remains grounded in military action and has been used in the past to justify violent military intervention. Thus, it can perpetuate the cycle of economic and military war that runs counter to attempts to move the world toward a culture of peace.

Common security more accurately reflects a UN perspective with its focus on peace, environment, and social justice, which are embodied in peace sustaining directives, including:

- to promote and fully guarantee respect for human rights, including the right to security, civil and political rights, and tolerance of difference;
- to ensure the preservation and protection of the environment, respecting the inherent worth of nature beyond human purpose, reducing the ecological footprint and moving away from the current model of over-consumptive development;
- to achieve a state of peace, justice and security;
- to reallocate the global military expenses to enable social justice;
- to guarantee labour rights, civil and political rights, social and cultural rights – right to food, right to housing, right to health care, right to education and social justice;
- to create a global structure that respects the rule of law and rights of citizens.

It is time to understand that human security on an Earth valued as our only habitat must claim resources that we cannot and must not waste on military expenditures and wars. Systems of institutionalized violence only intensify and entrench the human and environmental woes plaguing us. Peace advocates, feminists, and global civil society are voicing this reality more vigorously in the wake of the disastrous tsunamis. Policy recommendations representing major paradigm shifts in thinking are flooding the global policy stage.

This CSW must take note that the tsunamis in South Asia are a strong reminder that the global community has failed the South, and, as is so often the case when disaster strikes, those most affected are women and children. It is not that the UN has ignored the plight of the South, but rather that the member states of the UN have failed to comply and to implement the years of obligations and commitments made to the South and to women through the UN system.

Nations have recognized the urgency of the situation in the plethora of treaties, and conventions, and resolutions of the UN they have signed addressing issues related to equality, development, and peace -- the themes of the Beijing Conference. However, recognition without action is negligence.

It is time during Beijing +10- to renew commitment for compliance and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its related documents. Or should it

be left to women to meet the challenge? -- as millions of women are doing every day in the 21st century.

Recommendations:

1. We call for a renewed commitment to rid the world of homicidal weapons. The Political Declaration of this meeting should reinforce the "unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals" as agreed at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (2000). The nations of the world must move step-by-step to nuclear weapons abolition.

2. We call on the international system, including this Commission, to declare that under no circumstances should war be legal. The illegal and deliberate targeting of civilians, the unconscionable breadth and impact of the arms trade, the lethality of weapons, and the trauma and death of women and children in war and violent conflict make this imperative.

3. We call on CSW member states to request legal clarification of the self-defence provision in Article 51 of the UN Charter.

4. We call for new and renewed commitments to reduce military budgets in order to break the cycle of violence and respond to humankind's unprecedented cry for an end to war. At least as far back as back as 1972, governments recognized the urgency of reallocating the military budget and transferring the peace dividend to meeting human needs.

5. We call on all governments to create and employ institutional alternatives to armed conflict. Governments must take advantage of non-violent alternatives to armed action and provide a strong international system that includes laws, courts, and international police, with the assistance of experts within civil society, in particular women.

6. We call for the systematic inclusion of at least 40 per cent women and 40 per cent men in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to promote compliance with Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

7. We call on all governments to integrate peace and disarmament education into their systems of education at all levels of schooling, tertiary institutions, and teacher training programs.